

December 16, 2021

DOH REMINDS RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH STRAY PETS AND WILDLIFE



With cooler weather ahead and children playing outdoors during holiday vacations, December is a good time to review messaging about handling or feeding wildlife.

Florida Department of Health (DOH) county health departments in Citrus, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk and Sarasota remind you that any wild animal or

loose pet may be lost, frightened, or hurt – and more likely to bite. Raccoons and bats are the most common rabies carriers among wildlife, and you can protect your pet by making sure their vaccinations are current.

Here's some advice to avoid animal bites or contact with wildlife that may carry rabies:

- Do not approach stray pets or wildlife.
- Do not feed or attempt to pet or handle stray pets or wildlife.
- Do not disturb an animal that is sleeping, eating or caring for its young.
- If a strange animal walks toward you, stay calm and slowly move away.
- Bites from dogs are the most commonly reported animal bite. Additional tips for preventing bites from dogs include:
 - Dogs are more likely to bite other dogs than people; when walking your own pet dog, avoid areas where free-roaming dogs may be present.
 - If another dog attacks your dog, don't put any part of your body between the dogs; consider carrying a stick or another sturdy object that you can safely use to try to keep the aggressive dog away.
 - Do not make eye-to-eye contact with a stray or aggressive acting dog.
 - Do not run or scream if a stray dog approaches you – be “still like a tree.” If you fall or are knocked to the ground by a dog, curl into a ball with your hands over your head and neck. Protect your face. Try to stay still and do not scream.
 - Report stray dogs to local authorities such as your county's animal control.

If you are bitten by an animal and emergency help is needed, go to a hospital or medical treatment area or call 911.

Report the bite to your local animal control agency if they are open. Tell the animal control official everything you know about the animal and where it went.

CDC resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/animalhazards/index.html>

For further information, please contact your local county health department or visit www.floridahealth.gov or www.FloridaDisaster.org.

During severe weather and other emergencies, you can count on active alerts from the department's official social media accounts. One of the fastest ways to receive official and accurate health-related information is to monitor [@HealthyFla](https://twitter.com/HealthyFla) on Twitter and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyFla).

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](https://www.nacac.org/), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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